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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their December 28 news coverage on the assassination of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and on the expected second verdict of former Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou's special allowance case. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the conservative, pro-unification English-language "China Post" predicted several steps that President Chen Shui-bian might take to pursue Taiwan independence. A commentary on the op-ed page of the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" criticized the United States for bowing to China and opposing Taiwan's proposed referendum on applying for UN membership. End summary.

A) "Predictions of Developments in Taiwan Independence"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/28):

"... Rice's statement represented the strongest U.S. stand against Taiwan independence made by one of the highest Washington officials. But, such a verbal denunciation, just as so many made by other high-ranking U.S. officials before, appears to have little effect on President Chen's determination to push for Taiwan [to be] completely independent of mainland China. On the contrary, President Chen and his followers feel very secure with Rice's emphasis on American opposition to the use of force by the PRC to solve the Taiwan problem, plus the guarantee of U.S. help under the Taiwan Relations Act to defend the island should war break out in the Taiwan Strait.

"As legislative and presidential elections draw near, it is understandable that Chen must quicken the pace in pursuing the goal of independence to cater to 'deep green' voters for his personal benefit, as well as that of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). He also realizes that Washington is basically sympathetic to an independent Taiwan because it fits in with its global strategy and that Beijing is currently busy preparing for the Olympic Games and the World Exposition, and hence cannot devote much time and resources to tackling the Taiwan issue. In other words, in the present world situation, the two giant powers will likely exercise the utmost restraint in dealing with Taiwan independence activities.

"On the part of Taipei, it must do its best to avoid being perceived as achieving the objective of making Taiwan a full-fledged state. In fact, Taipei can obstinately insist that even when it does declare independence, it is still not 'de jure independence' if it is not formally recognized by the international community. It remains to be seen whether China and the U.S. will be so tolerant as to accept this kind of interpretation.

"The Chen administration will be emboldened (particularly when the referendum passes) to pursue independence. It may seek to preserve the name of the Republic of China (ROC) only in the document of the Constitution, to allow the DPP to back its claim that it does not

change the status quo because the official name of the country remains unchanged. Except for that, the ROC will literally disappear everywhere in Taiwan, just as it did on all the trappings in the presidential square on Double Ten National Day, making everyone ask which country's birthday was being celebrated. Recently, Chen has been frequently called the 'Taiwan president,' and some foreign heads of state even addressed him the 'president of the Republic of Taiwan.' When traveling abroad, Chen prefers to be called 'Taiwan president' even when the countries he is visiting formally recognize the ROC. ...

"... All indications are that Frank Hsieh, the DPP presidential candidate, is toeing President Chen's line on the question of Taiwan independence out of fear of losing 20 to 30 percent of the deep green votes. The U.S., as the world's strongest country and the most important ally of Taiwan, will be judged by history as responsible for its conniving and over-protective policy that has the effect of encouraging and misleading the island into a disastrous cross-strait military conflict over the independence issue."

B) "Why Is the US Backing the Chinese on Taiwan?"

Lin Chia, an independent commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (12/28):

"... The real reason the US is calling the UN referendum provocative is that the legitimacy of the referendum leaves them with no means to reject its outcome. Hence, the referendum has nothing to do with provocation. ...

"... The reason Taiwan has long been on the side of the US is that the two countries share common values and interests. If US politicians want to be Chinese mouthpieces on all kinds of issues

and put pressure on Taiwan, then the Taiwanese and the Americans will have fewer shared values and interests. The US is going too far in transmitting China's edicts.

"Washington's behavior might even make Taiwanese wonder if it is, in fact, US politicians who are trying to keep Taiwanese from deciding their own future in order to profit from the dispute and reap benefits from both sides.

"By causing this misunderstanding among Taiwanese, US politicians have hurt the Taiwanese public's faith in their country. The result is that Taiwanese are being gradually pushed toward China.

"This is a tragedy for Taiwan and it is also damaging to US interests and democracy around the world.

"This is perhaps also China's ultimate motive for placing pressure on the US to make Taiwan obedient."

YOUNG